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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of efficacy expectancy and valence of expected evaluation on social loafing (the tendency to put forth less effort when working collectively than when working individually) among 120 undergraduate students. Participants completed the Remote Associates Test. Efficacy expectancies were manipulated by varying preliminary task difficulty. Outcome expectancies were manipulated by varying the potential for self- and experimenter-evaluation on a second task. In the high-efficacy condition, participants in each of the evaluation conditions performed better than when no evaluation was possible. In the low-efficacy condition, participants in each of the evaluation conditions performed worse than when no evaluation was possible. Although previous research has shown that the valence of expected experimenter evaluation can produce differential effects on performance, this study suggests that these effects can be obtained for the valence of self-evaluation as well, even in the absence of experimenter evaluation. Findings suggest that a self-efficacy framework can account for loafing effects on both simple and complex tasks. (Author/NB)

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Self-efficacy, Self-evaluation, and Social Loafing
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ABSTRACT

Examined the effect of efficacy expectancy and valence of expected evaluation on social loafing. Efficacy expectancies were manipulated by varying preliminary task difficulty. Outcome expectancies were manipulated by varying the potential for self and experimenter evaluation on a second task. In the high-efficacy condition, participants in each of the evaluation conditions performed better than when no evaluation was possible. In the low-efficacy condition, participants in each of the evaluation conditions performed worse than when no evaluation was possible.

INTRODUCTION

Social loafing is a tendency for people to put forth less effort when working collectively than when working individually (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). Harkins and Jackson (1985) found that social loafing was eliminated only when performances were identifiable and when performances could be evaluated by an experimenter through a comparison with a coworker.

Szymanski and Harkins (1987) found that the potential for self-evaluation could also motivate performance. Therefore, the lack of evaluation by the self, in addition to the lack of evaluation by the experimenter, may be responsible for social loafing.

Our research was designed to extend these findings by examining the effect of expectations on performance. Self-efficacy theory (e.g., Bandura, 1986) maintains that a person's motivation is determined by two related expectancies: an efficacy expectancy, a person's belief that he or she is capable of performing the requisite behavior, and an outcome expectancy, a person's belief that the requisite behavior will lead to a given outcome.

Sanna (1992; Sanna & Shotland, 1990) has provided data that are consistent with a self-efficacy analysis. When participants expected to perform well, they expected a positive evaluation from an experimenter, and performance was improved relative to participants who did not expect evaluation. In contrast, when participants expected to perform poorly, they expected a negative evaluation from an experimenter, and performance was impaired relative to participants who did not expect evaluation.

Following this line of reasoning, we tested whether participants would be affected by self-efficacy expectancy and the valence of expected self-evaluation.

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METHOD

Participants were 120 undergraduate psychology students who completed the Remote Associates Test (RAT). Each RAT item consisted of 3 stimulus words that were related to a 4th unreported word that participants were to determine and record (see McFarlin & Blascovich, 1984). All stimuli and instructions were presented by computer.

Efficacy expectancies were manipulated on a preliminary task. High-efficacy participants performed a series of 6 easy RAT items, whereas low-efficacy participants performed a series of 6 difficult RAT items. Pilot testing had shown that this manipulation alone was sufficient to induce efficacy expectancies.

Expected evaluation by the self and experimenter was manipulated by providing or withholding: a measure of output, or a standard of comparison (see Szymanski & Harkins, 1987). Self-evaluation participants were told that they would be given the average number of RAT items answered correctly by participants in previous research, whereas no self-evaluation participants would not be given this information. Experimenter-evaluation participants were told that the experimenter would count the number of RAT items correctly answered, whereas for no experimenter-evaluation participants this would not be done. Participants then performed a second, neutral 10 item RAT task, which included 5 easy and 5 difficult items.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed using a series of 2 (efficacy: high vs. low) $\times$ 2 (experimenter-evaluation: yes vs. no) $\times$ 2 (self-evaluation: yes vs. no) ANOVAs.

Manipulation Checks

All manipulations were effective. There was a main effect of efficacy manipulation on participants' efficacy expectancies for the second RAT task, $F(1, 112) = 63.42$, $p < .01$ ($M_{\text{easy}} = 6.17$; $M_{\text{difficult}} = 3.15$).

For valence of self-evaluation, there was a main effect of efficacy, $F(1, 112) = 29.69$, $p < .01$, and an Efficacy $\times$ Self-Evaluation interaction, $F(1, 112) = 27.21$, $p < .01$. In the high-efficacy condition, means for self-evaluation and no self-evaluation were +3.33 vs. +0.30 ($p < .05$), respectively. In the low-efficacy condition, means for self-evaluation and no self-evaluation were -2.78 vs. +0.16 ($p < .05$), respectively.

For valence of experimenter-evaluation, there was a main effect of efficacy, $F(1, 112) = 32.13$, $p < .01$, and an Efficacy $\times$ Experimenter-Evaluation interaction, $F(1, 112) = 20.88$, $p < .01$. In the high-efficacy condition, means for experimenter-evaluation and no experimenter-evaluation were +3.78 vs. +0.39 ($p < .05$), respectively. In the low-efficacy condition, means for experimenter-evaluation and no experimenter-evaluation were -3.66 vs. -0.43 ($p < .05$), respectively.

Items Correct

As predicted, analysis of the number of items correct on the second RAT task revealed a main effect of efficacy, $F(1, 112) = 52.74$, $p < .01$, Efficacy x Self-Evaluation, $F(1, 112) = 6.17$, $p < .02$, Efficacy x Experimenter-evaluation ($F(1, 112) = 5.71$, $p < .02$, and three-way, $F(1, 112) = 4.06$, $p < .05$, interactions; the means for the predicted three-way interaction are presented in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

Although previous researchers have shown that the valence of expected experimenter evaluation can produce differential effects on performance (Sanna, 1992; Sanna & Shotland, 1990), our research suggests that these effects can be obtained for the valence of self-evaluation as well, even in the absence of experimenter evaluation.

Most interesting, our results can also be usefully compared to the results of previous social loafing research. In most previous research, participants have been limited to the performance of simple, well-learned tasks (e.g., clapping and shouting, Latané et al., 1979). When working on these simple tasks, it is plausible that participants developed high-efficacy expectancies. In previous research, as in our study, evaluated performance was found to be greater under these conditions than when no evaluation was possible. In contrast, when complex tasks were performed (Jackson & Williams, 1985), it is possible that low-efficacy expectancies developed. In prior research, as in our research, the possibility of evaluation, was found to result in impaired performance. It therefore appears that a self-efficacy framework can account for loafing effects on both simple and complex tasks. Future applications of self-efficacy theory to group performance phenomena should prove interesting.

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Table 1

Number of Items Correct by Efficacy, Self-evaluation, and Experimenter-evaluation

	Self-evaluation	No Self-evaluation
High-efficacy		
Experimenter-evaluation	5.93 _a	5.66 _a
No Experimenter-evaluation	5.80 _a	4.06 _b
Low-efficacy		
Experimenter-evaluation	2.33 _c	2.40 _c
No Experimenter-evaluation	2.46 _c	3.93 _b

Note. Means sharing different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$, whereas means sharing same subscripts do not differ significantly at $p > .20$, by a Duncan multiple-range test.